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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, I'm going to tell you right off the bat - I'm going to keep this week's commentary short. I'm tired, and sore - it's been quite a week.

I've finished cleaning up the remaining mess from last fall, and the yard looks good (well, much better!). Still a little to do to clean up some of my garden areas, but that's a simple task. The outside water is all reconnected, turned on, and ready to go. A few gutter covers need to be replaced after a brutal winter - another simple task. The yard has received its initial blast of weed killer and fertilizer, but could use some more, plus some seeding. I'm getting there, and way ahead of schedule!

And last week I started working back at the golf course. Not too hard at the moment, but I'm using muscles that were practically dormant all winter. I have to admit, I'm not as young as I'd like to think I am. And my body is proof of that!

So, it's an early night for me this week. Working again this weekend, and I need some rest. It's been a long time since I had to get up before the sun rises!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'll warn you right now that there really weren't enough messages in the NewsGroup to make a good column this week, but there's something that I want to get off my chest, so you're just going to have to suffer through it.

This past week, I got a chance to see the trailer for a movie called "EXPELLED (NO INTELLIGENCE ALLOWED)". As you've probably guessed, it's about the Evolution/Intelligent Design controversy.

Now, I know what you're thinking: "Hmmm... didn't that whole thing die down a couple of years ago?"

Yes, it did. But it seems that now, Ben Stein; teacher, Nixon speech-writer, television game show host and movie star, has decided that he wants to make some money on the situation.

I must say right out front that I have not (yet) seen the whole movie. All I've seen is a trailer which, I can only assume, mimics the overall tone and mood of the movie.

If I had any doubts about Mr. Stein's political leanings or social agenda, they have been assuaged by his current offering's tone, tenor and attitude. Most prevalent right out of the shoot is the theme that 'they' don't want you to believe <fill-in-the-blank>. It could lead to you being ostracized, and even get you fired from your job, they warn.

This is a device that's been used by politicians for eons, and more often than usual in the past decade. There's no better way to get people to waste time than to tell them that someone doesn't want them to know or believe something. It's just one more facet of the 'politics of fear', I'm afraid.

Next on my checklist was the idea that someone who supports one theory in favor of another should have something to say in favor of their preference as opposed to just having something negative to say about the one they don't support. In other words, don't tell me "this must be right because I think the other one is wrong". The main argument I hear 'in favor of' Intelligent Design is that Darwinism doesn't explain everything completely.

Another of my favorite gripes is proponents of Intelligent Design are always quick to point out that "evolution is just a theory". And they're right. But you know what? GRAVITATION is just a theory too. Take a pencil and drop it in front of you. No matter how many times you do it, and no matter where you do it (on the surface of the Earth), the results are going to be the same: the pencil will fall. Despite the fact that gravitation is 'only' a theory, you will never, ever drop a pencil anywhere on the surface of the Earth and have it fall UP. The fact that "Darwinism" is a theory has no bearing on its validity.

Okay, on to my next point. The movie (or, at least the trailer for the movie) would have you believe that there is widespread disagreement within the scientific community about the validity of the theory of evolution. That simply isn't so. It's also fairly common to hear proponents of Intelligent Design say that they have a right to have ID taught in the classroom right alongside evolution. Au contrair, mon frere. The fact that you WANT something to be true doesn't make it so. Truth is a philosophical quality. FACT is a scientific quality. You simply cannot say that something is science simply because you want to believe it.

Next point: Irreducible Complexity. Proponents of ID will often point to the eye as proof that a 'Creator' or intelligent force must have been involved in making things exactly as we see them today, because no combination of pre-existing things could have been brought together or modified to result in the current thing. Ask any biologist and they'll tell you that lenses and light-sensing cells abound in the natural

world, and some can even be genetically tied to the evolution of the eye.

Another ’ding’: Stacking the Deck. If you want people to believe in Intelligent Design, because it is not a valid scientific theory, you must first work to degrade the scientific theories that oppose it. Things like the age of the Universe. You’ll often hear Creationists and ID proponents say that current scientific theories must be incorrect because they take for granted that the Universe must be billions of years old, and anyone who’s read the bible knows that the world is only a little over six THOUSAND years old.

I’ve got to admit that this one has me scratching my head. If you can get people to believe that the world is only six thousand years old, you can get them to believe anything... why stop at Intelligent Design?? Why not get them to believe that you really have their best interests at heart and that giving tax breaks to the very rich will quickly help the poor? Oh. Nevermind. [grin]

Finally, the thing that got me was that they showed pictures of either Copernicus or Galileo and Einstein, saying that, in THEIR day, Intelligent Design would have been accepted as an alternative easily.

Well, on this count, I’ve got to agree with them. Copernicus and Galileo lived during times when the Church held sway over everything, and disagreeing with them could very quickly get unhealthy. Copernicus was charged with heresy during the Inquisition for teaching that the Earth revolved around the Sun, not the other way around. This was contrary to church teachings. Sure, Intelligent Design would have been accepted back then... it would have fit right in.

And I’ve got to confess (in keeping with the "church" theme I’ve got going here, I guess) that I really have no idea of what point Ben Stein was trying to make by dragging Einstein into it. Unless, of course, it’s because Nazi Germany had spent at least a couple of decades denouncing Einstein’s theories as "Jewish Science". Does that really make them feel better? Really?

Well, I leave it to you, my fair reader. You are free to believe in Intelligent Design, or dueling sea dragons, or the world being carried on the back of a great turtle. I’ll fight to my last breath to protect that right. But please, PLEASE don’t try to tell me that it’s science. Faith is a wonderful thing. It’s what makes us who we are, more so than any other facet of our lives. But Faith-Based Science is an oxymoron. I find it almost amusing that the reverse doesn’t hold true. Don’t you?

So, do I want you to get all up-in-arms and boycott this movie (Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed... limited showings from mid-April, 2008, http://www.expelledthemovie.com)? Hell no! I WANT you to go see it... Heck, I’ll probably see it at least a couple of times to try and determine if maybe there’s some satire involved that I missed from watching the trailer. Go see the movie. Think about it, and talk about it.... and think about it some more.

Well, enough of that. Let’s get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Rob Aries asks about alternative storage devices for his Falcon:

"I am trying to resurrect a Falcon 030 that has been in my attic for a long time. The HD is toast (click of death). I saw somewhere how a person used a compact flash card to replace his Falcon HD. I bought an IDE --> CF adapter on Ebay and I have an old 128MB card I was using in a camera. My next step is to format & partition the card.

Another search of my attic, and the only such software I found was for my old Link (used with my even older Atari ST). It's ICD software (v6.2.4 IIRC) but works ONLY with Adaptec host controllers. It sees the CF card as "unrecognized unit" on ID #15, then it hangs.

Some online searching and I see the well-regarded HDDRIVER software, however the demo won't format. Since I am really doing all this for curiosity's sake and may not even use this Falcon (actually it's not even mine), I am wondering if there is any free/shareware options anywhere for making this CF card work."

Adam Brannon tells Rob to...

"Go to http://www.atari.org/services/systemdisks.php. It has almost all Atari system disks available to download, including the Falcon HDD drivers disks. This should get you started."

Rob tells Adam simply:

"Thank you! Now I have a Falcon with a 120MB flash drive!"

How's that for fast, folks? Pretty slick, huh? Meanwhile, someone posted last week that the source code for the Jinnee desktop had been lost, so the project can now be considered dead. The last release of Jinnee, it seems, truly IS the last. On the subject of Teradesk and its code being available for use, Henk Robbers talks a bit about building upon it to make a new desktop:

"I still believe that the name "Teradesk" should remain being associable with a simple and compact desktop as it is now.

If you want more, the code is GPL, feel free but call it different. XA_desk sounds like a good idee.

Djordje, do you agree?"

Djordje Vukovic replies:

"Yes, completely.

Regarding the simplicity- or otherwise:
An important part of my concept when I first took part in TeraDesk project was that it should remain compact and simple. Many times there arose a situation where I had to weight the benefits of adding some option against the increase of code size and memory usage, and increased complexity of use. It seems that people using more capable

machines tend to forget that there is also a number of users with feebler Atari machines who find that TeraDesk, as it is now, exactly satisfies their needs. They would have no use of marvelous desktops needing X megabytes of RAM and XX megabytes of disk space. As there were already two other desktops targeted at capable machines, I think it was a good decision to provide a new one having in mind primarily the feeble and the poor :) - therefore it was clearly said, when TeraDesk 3 was released, that it was not intended as a replacement for Thing and Jinnee.

I would also like to point that the (good-natured) objections raised here against TeraDesk appear to concern the cosmetic side mostly- not the functionality. There seems to be a general agreement that TeraDesk does what it is supposed to do, reliably. And yes, I agree that the code has become tightly connected and there are some legacy segments in it, but it is all in the function of fulfilling its purpose and design concept.

By the way. some things should remain simple. I think that there are rising issues of visual appearance of GUIs, icons etc. (on any operating system) that will have to be discussed soon. How standardized should they be? How complex can a display become before it becomes unmanangeable by human users, whose brains do not double their processing power every couple of years, as CPUs do?

Imagine that one is driving a fast car and comes to a traffic sign warning of a dangerous bend ahead (a simple three-colour triangular icon). Would the message be better and more quickly understood by the driver if, instead of the traffic sign, there was a magnificent true color photograph, in 8000x4000 resolution, of a pile of crashed cars, on which one could read every number on license plates, recognize the members of salvage teams caught in the scene, and read the logos and advertisements on cars of media people present?

(a question: why would anyone need a truecolour desktop icon?)

Regarding the naming of names:

In order to avoid confusion, it would indeed be better to create a new name for any significantly different new fork, and leave "TeraDesk" name (btw. I never found out what was this supposed to mean) to the current fork.

About development of a new desktop:

It is all very nice, but I would like to say a few words of warning: I joined TeraDesk project several months after Henk revived it. It took us almost a year to overhaul it significantly and create TeraDesk 3. Since then, a number of things were added, problems fixed and it took more than four years to get it to its present status (and there are still some improvements to make- a new bugfix release is due soon). I am afraid that if a new desktop project is started, by the time it reaches a really usable state there will hardly be any users left (or even left alive). We have an example of "Direct" desktop with nice visual effects but relatively poor functionality that was abandoned soon after initial release. We have painfully slow advances e.g. in Highwire (is it still developed at all?) and even in XaAES (when was the last release?).

There was a general once, who said something about having good ideas today, against excellent ideas tomorrow..."

Jean-Francois Lemaire answers Djordje’s question about needing a true-color icon:

"Because an icon designed in a modern graphics application with gradients, Gaussian blurs or transparency looks like crap when converted in 256 colours, let alone 16. I know that from experience. It removes much of the fun of creating new icons. Drawing pixel by pixel in Interface may be courageous, but not everyone is a masochist.

So, the user may not *need* a true colour icon, but the artist *wants* them because they make it’s work easier. Now don’t ask me why would anyone need gradients in an icon."

Djordje replies:

"The last sentence/question is in fact the important one. What an artist likes is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the interface is convenient -to the user-. Icons or whatever other symbols are used to communicate with a computer should be simple, quickly readable by the user, standardized and possibly human-language independent. Use of gradients, blurs or transparencies seems to me to be counter-productive in that context. The "icons" need not be the likenesses of anything- just easily recognizable, difficult to misinterpret, graphic shapes. A set of highly-stylised Chinese-like or Egyptian-like pictograms comes to mind.

OT: for a long time we were taught (more-less) that pictographic writing was used mostly by "primitive" societies early in human history, and that it was made obsolete by the invention of phonetic alphabets. Lately, we are seeing a significant revival of the use of pictograms, which prove to be more convenient when it is necessary to convey instantly-readable messages, or communicate across language barriers. On the other hand, increased use of pictograms, together with increased graphic power of computers and telecommunications devices, seems to indicate the onset of wide-spread, computer induced illiteracy- fewer and fewer people will want to actually read or write anything and a richness of words will be gradually lost. I am not sure that humanity will benefit from such development."

Jean-Francois replies:

"What I meant to say is that by allowing true colour icons you allow the guy/gal who will actually do the drawing full control over it’s creativity. By limiting the display to 256 colours you don’t. Liking or not liking what he/she does with the 16700000 colours at his/her disposal is just a matter of opinion."

’Phantomm’ asks about a virtual memory manager and a Falcon:

"[Has] Anyone had any experience using the program Outside, virtual memory manager with a CT2B Falcon?

I know that some programs don’t work well with the FastRam of a CT2B and want to make sure that the Outside program is compatible before setting it up."

Jo Even Skarstein tells Phantomm:

"The CT2 use the MMU to map FastRAM, so I doubt that Outside will work."

Uwe Seimet tells Jo Even:

"It depends on the translation tables. If the mapping is similar to the one used by the TT TOS it might also work for the CT2."

Mark Bedingfield adds his experiences (and memory):

"I’m pretty sure I got it working on my CT2B. I’ll have a look tonight and see if its still installed. I have 64MB fast ram anyway, so never use it;-) All that’s required is a 030 or better if I remember correctly."

When someone mentions a "clean way" of installing a separate file selector using N.AES, Gerhard Stoll asks:

"What [is the] clean way of installing a separate fileselector that N.AES has?"

Jo Even Skarstein tells Gerhard:

"N.Fsel hooks into N.AES using a clean interface. I’m not sure if it’s documented anywhere though."

Well folks, that’s it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week’s Gaming Section - Little League World Series 2008!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" ’Gran Turismo 5 Prologue’!
EU: Protect Minors Better!
And more!

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->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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’Gran Turismo 5 Prologue’ Thrills Despite Slim Options

The latest release of Gran Turismo is missing quite a bit under the hood.

Instead of waiting to unveil a full version of the hit racing series for PlayStation 3, developers roll out the scaled-back Gran Turismo 5 Prologue. The options are slim, but the experience is powerful.

Prologue is the appetizer for the eventual release of Gran Turismo 5. Players can choose from more than 60 cars. Its predecessor, Gran Turismo 4, has a garage of 700 vehicles.

After purchasing your first vehicle, you advance to circuit racing. Each tier involves 10 races you must conquer before moving to the next circuit. The events are spread across six tracks, including Daytona International Speedway.

Depending on how you finish, you’ll earn points for each race, which you can use to purchase new vehicles. Unfortunately, none of the visual and performance customizations are available to buy this time around.

Prologue is one of the most gorgeous racing titles available. Vehicles glisten in sunlight. Textures like asphalt and metallic finishes look incredibly authentic. The interior dash perspective is an astounding first-person view of the action. You’ll see your driver shift gears as he navigates tracks. A high-speed spin out in some of the more powerful vehicles is dizzying. The sounds of tires screeching or engines revving are sharp.

Handling is as unique as the vehicles’ make and model. Cars with high horsepower may accelerate quickly, but require greater skill when navigating sharp turns. On the other hand, some smaller cars may not be the fastest, but take turns with precision.

What’s baffling about Prologue is how vehicles can manage to slam into walls or other cars at high speeds and show no signs of damage. You can rear end a car going well over 100 mph and not even end up with a busted taillight.

The other glaring issue is the lack of options. Granted, the scaled-down format has been known since the title was first announced. If you’re a Gran Turismo fan, however, prepare to see even less than expected.

Not only are there fewer vehicles and tracks, but there’s little variety in the events available. Standard races, time trials and drift challenges are among the handful of events. While Gran Turismo finally makes its online debut, with up to 16-player races, the types of races remain limited.

But the lack of selections is offset by Prologue’s $39.99 price tag, roughly $20 less than a standard PS3 release. And once you hit the track, you’ll learn the ride in Gran Turismo remains exhilarating.

Activision Steps to the Plate with ’Little League World Series 2008’ for Wii and Nintendo DS

Activision, Inc. announced Wednesday the upcoming release of Little League World Series 2008 for Wii and Nintendo DS. Players will have the ability to bat, pitch and field using intuitive controls developed exclusively for Nintendo’s platforms. Little League World Series is the perfect game to play with your friends and family. The game hits shelves August 5, 2008.

"Little League baseball fans, players and families simply haven’t had a videogame made just for them, so our goal is to fill this niche," said Dave Oxford, Activision Publishing. "Creating this game with the Little League organization has been a pleasure and we look forward to paying homage to the three million Little League players around the world today."

Little League World Series is the first officially licensed Little League video game to hit next-generation consoles. Bat, pitch and field your way from local sandlot slugger to Little League World Series Champion. Featuring eight U.S. and eight international teams, extraordinarily deep character customization, World Series Mode, and various skill based challenges, Little League World Series offers an exciting, authentic baseball experience. Motion-sensing controls on Wii make it accessible for Little League players and parents, while the DS version gives players the freedom to get on the diamond anywhere.

"Activision has captured the essence of what makes Little League so wonderful for players and spectators alike," Jud Rogers, Sr. Marketing Executive, Little League International. "We look forward to working with them in the upcoming months to help polish the game and bring it to Little Leaguers and fans."

Asian History Inspires New Online Games

After exhausting just about every elf, dragon and knight featured in Western cultures, makers of popular online games are turning to ancient Asian history and war heroes for new inspiration.

Chief among their sources is "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," an epic Chinese novel whose plots and characters are familiar to most Asians.

"Romance," which long existed in oral form before it was put together in writing in the 14th century, covers a chaotic two-century period in ancient China marked by infighting between warlords following the fall of the Han Dynasty.

The story, full of dramatic and bloody episodes about ruthless ambition, military tactics, loyalty and betrayal, yielded numerous battle legends and war heroes that are still venerated by Asians.

It also makes for an ideal theme for movies and TV shows, with the latest being John Woo’s "Red Cliff," to be released just before the Beijing Olympics.

While awareness of ancient Chinese history is still limited in the West,

critical and popular hits such as the film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and last week's Jackie Chan vehicle "Forbidden Kingdom" are preparing Western gamers for the idiosyncrasies of Asian-based games.

Japanese game developer Koei Co Ltd has pioneered games based on "Romance of the Three Kingdoms," from PC games in floppy disk to brand new console versions running on Microsoft's Xbox 360.

Its "Dynasty Warriors" series, featuring legendary characters from the novel combined with kung-fu style action, sold more than 15 million copies worldwide.

Now, makers of online games are trying to bring the well-known saga into multiplayer role-playing games. They say the novel provides all the materials needed, from characters to political landscape, to entertain online gamers for months of play.

"Romance" could re-energize an industry suffering from the lack of a major blockbuster game since "World of Warcraft" by Blizzard Entertainment Inc launched in 2004.

South Korean game developer Wemade Entertainment unveiled a multiplayer role-playing game, "Chang Chun," last year. In it, characters mingle with people from real Chinese history and get involved in politics and battles. Gamers build their martial art skills, acquire weapons and armor, form clans and lead wars against each other.

Converting centuries-old texts into virtual reality, however, proved a tough task.

"It took more than four years of research into the novel's contents, Chinese history, architecture, clothing and so on," said Park Jung-soo, who leads Wemade's development team. "All members of our team went on research trips to China."

Gamers appreciate such efforts, saying details and historical facts are key attractions.

"Managing troops, food supply and other elements to win the war is very interesting. There's also a whole system for government offices and rankings," said an online user, who wanted to be identified by ID sbh8243.

"If you want to engage more, you can join the policy team and lead the country you're in."

"Warlord" by Neowiz Games takes a step further in its attempt to blend Western and Eastern war history. A gamer can choose among characters from different cultures, such as a Chinese general, a Japanese ninja or a magician knight from ancient Europe. As the game progresses, the gamer faces famous generals and warriors from history books.

Kim Jae-young, production manager at Neowiz Games, said developers at the firm combed through not only history books but artwork, prehistoric wall paintings and artifacts to rebuild the scenes from long-gone historic moments.

Analysts say well-made games based on "Romance" have the potential to become money-spinners, given the fast-growing gamer population in China. Wemade, which is offering a trial of "Chang Chun" in China, said it ranks

among the most popular online games there.

"The Chinese online game market has yet to fully boom up," said Shim Jun-bo, an analyst at CJ Investment & Securities.

"One day there will be a perfectly made ’Romance of the Three Kingdoms’ game from a major studio like Blizzard, and it will become an absolute blockbuster."

EU Tells Videogame Industry To Protect Minors Better

Videogame makers and shops have two years to come up with a widely accepted industry code of conduct to better protect children from violent images, the European Union’s executive body said on Tuesday.

"Creators have to enjoy freedom of expression but at the same time it’s an industry that impacts society," EU Information Society Commissioner Viviane Reding told a news conference.

Worldwide revenues from videogaming are expected to reach 30 billion euros ($47.5 billion) within two years, of which the 27-nation EU will account for about one-third, Reding said.

Public concerns that videogames can cause aggressive behavior have been heightened by school shootings such as that in Finland last November, and have led to several countries banning games such as "Manhunt 2," Reding added.

The EU executive has powers to propose legislation, but decided to give the sector two years to come up with a code of conduct that has wider industry backing than the current one. The industry is also being asked to spend more on advertising its symbols denoting the age suitability of games.

"When children go out to play today they enter the world of joysticks. We are not quite sure where they go and there is real anxiety from parents," EU Consumer Protection Commissioner Meglena Kuneva said.

The industry’s age classification system - Pan European Games Information (PEGI) - is sponsored by more than 200 industry members and used in 20 of the 27 EU states. There is also an online version but with far fewer industry backers.

The Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers’ Association (ELSPA), a videogame industry lobby, said the PEGI age rating system was robust.

"Importantly, it protects children as games move increasingly online and therefore should be adopted by UK regulators. We look forward to discussing this at the forthcoming UK consultation," ELSPA’s director general Paul Jackson said.

The European Commission wants PEGI’s age symbols to become familiar to the public but it accepts there is no conclusive evidence that violent videogames influence children’s behavior.

"We want to work in this environment on a precautionary principle," Kuneva said.

Last year a U.S. federal judge struck down a 2005 California state law barring the sale of violent videogames to minors as unconstitutional, adding there was no evidence such games were any more harmful than some television shows and movies.

Scenes of bloody killings were scaled back to allow Manhunt 2 to go on sale to U.S. players aged 17 years and older.

Making a game for adults only is seen as uncommercial as hardware makers such as Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo do not allow such content on their machines, which are popular with children.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

China Vaults Past USA in Internet Users

China, already the world leader in cellphone use, has surpassed the USA as the No. 1 nation in Internet users.

The number of Chinese on the Internet hit more than 220 million as of February, according to estimates from official Chinese statistics by the Beijing-based research group BDA China. The government is likely to confirm the leap at its half-yearly report in July.

The longtime Internet leader, the USA, which founded and developed the network of computers, had 216 million users at the end of 2007, according to Nielsen/NetRatings.

The percentage of American users - 71% - still exceeds China's 17%. China has 1.3 billion people, compared with nearly 304 million in the USA.

China, however, has a higher growth rate, says BDA's chairman, Duncan Clark. By the end of March, for example, Chinese users climbed to 233 million.

At the end of 2007, China's Internet users reached 210 million, a jump of 53% from the previous year, says Zhang Shanshan, media director for the China Internet Network Information Center, which gathers statistics for the Ministry of Information Industry.

Clark says the rapid growth is powered in part by China's economic boom. While the government "continues to filter the Net and encourage self-censorship, it also has a mandate to promote cheaper technology and the knowledge economy."

And there is strong government backing for companies such as China Netcom, which offers broadband service at $10 a month, Clark says.

At the company’s Xibahe branch in north Beijing, dozens of people recently lined up to buy broadband service.

Sun Xin, 19, a student, was helping his parents sign up for DSL.

"My friends all agree - no Internet, no life," Sun says. "We use it every day for MSN, and I love playing games like World of Warcraft." The game is so popular that players can pay companies in China to play in their place so they can continue gaining points.

Microsoft in Quandary Over Yahoo Bid as Key Deadline Looms

Microsoft Corp. is no closer to buying Yahoo Inc. than when it made its $44.6 billion bid nearly three months ago, leaving the software maker in a quandary over whether the deal is still worth pursuing.

A decision is likely to emerge in the next few days, with Yahoo facing a weekend deadline to accept the offer. Although the deadline expires Saturday, Microsoft has indicated it probably won’t reveal its next move until early next week.

The tense mating dance is at a standstill because Yahoo’s board has repeatedly said it won’t sell to Microsoft for less than $45 billion, even though the bid hoisted its stock shortly after it hit a four-year low in late January.

The impasse has left most analysts predicting Microsoft will either sweeten its offer or attempt to replace Yahoo’s board with a slate of directors who will embrace a takeover.

But the architects of Microsoft’s bid - Chief Executive Steve Ballmer and Chief Financial Officer Chris Liddell - have been signaling the Redmond, Wash.-based company might abandon the bid and leave Sunnyvale-based Yahoo twisting in the wind.

The public remarks of Ballmer and Liddell could be just part of a negotiating ploy aimed at pressuring Yahoo to the negotiating table.

But some analysts think Microsoft would be smart to walk away now.

By turning a cold shoulder, Microsoft could position itself to return with another bid this summer in hopes of completing the acquisition without suffering through the disruption and rancor likely to erupt if Microsoft were to try to oust Yahoo’s board in a risky process known as a proxy contest.

This scenario could only pan out if Microsoft is correct in its belief that Yahoo is stuck in a downward spiral after steadily losing ground in the online advertising market during the past two years.

Unless Yahoo can bounce back, its shares might eventually drop even lower than their $19.18 price when Microsoft made its initial bid of $31.

Yahoo shares fell 50 cents to finish Friday at $26.80, pulled down by the declining value of Microsoft’s cash-and-stock bid.

Driven by Wall Street’s disappointment with the company’s short-term outlook, Microsoft shares dropped $1.97 to $29.83 on Friday. The decline lowered the value of the Yahoo bid to $42.7 billion, or $29.68 per share.

If Yahoo’s stock were to plummet into the mid-teens, Microsoft conceivably could return with another offer that would probably be more warmly received than its original bid.

"Yahoo management would be under inordinate pressure to accept at that point," said Dinosaur Securities analyst David Garrity. "Why go through all the distractions and expense of a proxy fight if you see another way" to an amicable transaction?

Yahoo management has expressed confidence in a turnaround plan that projects revenue increases of 25 percent in 2009 and 2010. But analyst estimates for those years have remained substantially below those targets - a sign of the widespread skepticism about whether Yahoo will be able to reach its ambitious goals.

Abandoned takeover bids have paved the way to corporate acquisitions before. Just last fall, Oracle Corp. withdrew a $6.7 billion bid for rival business software maker BEA Systems Inc. after being spurned and then wrapped up the takeover for $8.5 billion three months later.

Other analysts remain convinced Microsoft will either raise its bid or launch a proxy contest because it needs Yahoo’s franchise to mount a more serious challenge Google Inc.’s dominance of the Internet’s search and advertising market.

"We still believe (Microsoft) is committed to completing the transaction and is unlikely to walk away," Citigroup analyst Brent Thill wrote in a Friday note.

McAdams Wright Ragen analyst Sid Parakh said he can’t envision Microsoft raising its offer, especially since Yahoo’s management hasn’t proven its strategy will boost the company’s stock price above $30 on its own.

Microsoft’s current bid is "already a stretch, and I don’t see any reason for them to really bid against themselves," Parakh said.

Yahoo could try to extract a higher bid by farming out some of the advertising on its Web site to Google. The two sides just completed a two-week trial that allowed Google to show text-based advertising along a small percentage of Yahoo’s search results.

A long-term advertising partnership with Google probably would provide a significant boost to Yahoo’s profits, but antitrust concerns might block an alliance between the owners of the Internet’s two largest search engines. Combined, Google and Yahoo control more than 80 percent of the U.S. search market.

Yahoo also has been exploring a possible merger with the online operations of Time Warner Inc.’s AOL, but most analysts view that as a weaker alternative to a Microsoft takeover.

As it stands now, Yahoo’s first-quarter revenue growth of 9 percent is far behind both Google’s and Microsoft’s online services division, which climbed 42 percent and 40 percent, respectively.

That’s just one reason Garrity believes Ballmer and Liddell are realizing

that Microsoft doesn’t need Yahoo at any price.

"Sometimes the best deals are the ones that aren’t done," he said.

Rock Phish Gang Adds Second Punch to Phishing Attacks

A notorious online gang known for its prolific phishing operations has expanded its means of attack, potentially putting more PC users at risk of losing personal data.

The Rock Phish gang surfaced around 2004, becoming well-known for its expertise in setting up phishing sites, which seek to trick people into divulging sensitive data, as well as for selling phishing kits designed for less technical cybercriminals.

Now, the phishing sites linked with the Rock Phish gang are being rigged with a drive-by download, a type of attack that can infect a PC with malicious software without any interaction by the user, researchers from vendor RSA said Monday.

The one-two punch means that even people who go to the phishing site but aren’t fooled into inputting their personal details could still be infected, wrote Uriel Maimon, a senior researcher, on RSA’s blog.

The phishing Web site tries to exploit any software vulnerabilities, and if it finds one, will then load the Zeus Trojan onto the PC. Zeus is particularly dangerous: it can collect data on forms, take screen shots, pilfer passwords from browsers and remotely control the computer, Maimon wrote.

Zeus also comes in at least 150 flavors. One of the phishing kits being sold now for US$700 masks how Zeus appears to security programs. That kit uses a binary generator, which creates a new binary file for Zeus for every kit.

Antivirus programs uses signatures, or data files, that describe what malicious programs "look" like in order to be detected. But creating new binaries can render security programs blind. Most of the popular antivirus programs can’t detect the variants.

"These files are radically different from each other, making them notoriously difficult for antivirus or security software to detect," Maimon wrote.

Web Criminals Fuel Big Rise in "Trojans"

Cyber-criminals are behind a dramatic rise in stealthy programs called "trojans" that infect computers to sell rogue software, send unwanted email or steal personal data, a study has found.

In a report released in London, Microsoft said the number of trojans removed from computers around the world in the second half of 2007 rose by 300 percent from the first half.

The figure has risen so sharply because more computers are fitted with software that detects malicious programs and because criminals had come to see trojans as their "tool of choice," the report said.

"The numbers have simply exploded, it’s huge," said Vinny Gullotto, general manager of the Microsoft Malware Protection Center. "There is a lot of criminal intent there."

Trojans can log keystrokes to gather passwords, send spam from private computers or harvest email addresses or personal information for criminal purposes.

The most common family of trojans last year was "Win32/Zlob," a piece of malicious software, or malware, that people unwittingly download from the Internet.

Its designers trick people into saving it by telling them they need a new piece of software to watch video online.

Once installed, it bombards people with pop-up messages and bogus flashing warnings that their computer is infected.

The messages say: "Your computer is infected! Windows has detected spyware infection. Click here to protect your computer."

The trojan then sends adverts offering to sell rogue anti-spyware on sites that could expose customers to credit card fraud. Microsoft said the problem is global and linked to organized criminal gangs.

"The majority (of trojans) come from the (United) States, China, Russia and South America," Gullotto said on the fringes of the Infosecurity Europe trade conference on Tuesday.

Microsoft said the number of computers around the world that were made safe after being infected with trojans rose from one million in the second half of 2006 to 19 million in the second half of 2007.

The report is online: http://www.microsoft.com/security/portal/sir.aspx

Study Finds Infected Web Pages on the Rise

A year ago, one out of every 909 e-mails was infected with malicious code. In the first quarter of 2008, only one out of every 2,500 was infected. Good news? Not really. All it means is that the attackers have changed tactics to overcome the defenses you’re building, according to security company Sophos.

"As companies implement better e-mail defenses, the hackers are looking for new avenues of attack. E-mail also lacks some of the flexibility that Web-based attacks can offer," said Richard Wang, U.S. SophosLabs Manager.

A study done by Sophos that examines the security events and trends of the first quarter of this year showed that the decline in attacks against e-mail was balanced by what the company calls "an unprecedented number of threats" targeting Web pages. Last year, the company detected an average of roughly 5,000 infected Web pages a day; this quarter, the average is 15,000 per day. That’s one new infected Web page every five

seconds.

And these are sites you may well visit: 79 percent are legitimate sites, not sites set up specifically to host malicious attacks.

"The Web gives hackers an easy way to deliver software to their victims," Wang said. "It also allows them to change the software they are using at a moment's notice. This makes the Web far more flexible as an attack vector than e-mail."

Companies in the United States are taking the worst beating from the switch in tactics, with domestic companies now unwittingly hosting the greatest number of malicious content. (Last year, the number-one spot was held by China.)

"The most likely cause of this is the hackers' move away from purpose-built malicious Web sites. The vast majority of sites that we now see hosting malware are legitimate sites that hackers have broken into and added their own code. All kinds of sites, from auto parts to Web design, are now hosting dangerous software," Wang told us.

No one is immune from malware, with attackers taking pains to ensure that different browsers and operating systems are treated equally. According to Wang, "If a user browses to an infected Web page, the hacker can deliver different attack software depending on the operating system and browser that the user has. A Windows user with Internet Explorer will experience a different attack from a Mac OS X user with Safari."

The Sophos report also shows that more than 92 percent of all e-mail sent in the first quarter of this year was spam. "The sheer number of Web sites related to spam is growing at an incredible rate," Wang said. "Sophos finds over 23,000 new spam-related sites every day - that's about one every three seconds." Expect to find more spam in your in-box, Sophos says, as spammers continue to bypass CAPTCHA systems meant to distinguish humans from automated spambots.

Also on the increase are attacks aimed at individuals, Wang said. "We have seen a significant increase in targeted phishing attacks, also known as 'spear-phishing.' In these attacks, people known to belong to a specific organization or group are precisely targeted. We have seen spear-phishing attacks against college students, ISP users, and even CEOs."

The best defense, Sophos says, is to defend Web and e-mail gateways, protect end-point devices, and educate users on safe computing practices.

EBay Sues Craigslist Over Alleged Stake Dilution

EBay Inc, the world's largest online auctioneer, sued Craigslist, a competitor in which it holds an ownership stake, in a dispute over whether the Internet bulletin board tried to blunt eBay's control.

EBay alleged in the lawsuit that the board of directors of Craigslist, the Web's dominant classifieds listing service, took "unilateral actions" to dilute eBay's 28.4 percent stake by more than 10 percent, eBay said in a statement.

The suit, filed on Tuesday under seal, asked a Delaware Chancery Court to rescind the unspecified actions to protect eBay's stockholders and preserve its stake in Craigslist.

The suit names as defendants Craigslist founder, Craig Newmark, who runs the company in a famously open-minded style, and Chief Executive Jim Buckmaster. Newmark and Buckmaster are the only members of Craigslist's board of directors.

EBay bought a minority ownership stake in 2004, and launched its own free online classifieds site, called Kijiji, three years later in the United States.

The two services directly compete in the United States and about a dozen countries, with Kijiji tailoring its ads to young families rather than maintaining a Craigslist-style open marketplace.

In an email, Newmark had no comment on the lawsuit, or on whether the dispute involved the companies' business rivalry, saying Craigslist needed "a little time to figure it all out."

An eBay spokeswoman said the disputed board actions concerned "corporate governance issues" and did not involve Kijiji.

She said eBay could reveal no more about its complaint without Craigslist's permission to protect information about privately held Craigslist governed by confidentiality restrictions.

Craigslist Fires Back, Blasts eBay Actions As Unethical

Craigslist is firing back at its rival and minority owner eBay, scolding the online auctioneer's actions as unethical and smelling of a hostile takeover.

In a move that pits two of the Internet's most popular sites against each other, EBay Inc. sued the online classifieds company Tuesday, alleging it unfairly tried to dilute eBay's stake in it.

EBay purchased a 28 percent stake in privately held Craigslist in 2004.

But in January, eBay says, Craigslist's board, consisting of founder Craig Newmark and Chief Executive Jim Buckmaster, unilaterally acted to dilute eBay's economic interest in Craigslist by more than 10 percent.

In an entry titled "Tainted Love" that Craigslist posted on its blog Tuesday night, the company said the allegations are unfounded and the lawsuit came from out of the blue.

"Coming from a company that views Craigslist as a prime competitor, filing suit without so much as mentioning these assertions to us beforehand seems unethical, and suggests ulterior motives. ... Ebay has absolutely no reason to feel threatened unless a hostile takeover of Craigslist, or the sale of Ebay's stake in Craigslist to an unfriendly party, is their ultimate goal," the post said.

EBay, the world's largest online auctioneer, was an unsolicited suitor

to quirky Craigslist in 2004. An unnamed former Craigslist shareholder sought out eBay and sealed a deal whose financial terms were never disclosed.

At the time, Newmark said the companies had similar philosophies, but a company spokeswoman said, "Craigslist has never sought any outside money, and that’s not going to change."

EBay said at the time of the deal that it was interested in learning about the classifieds business, a portion of its own site that’s been growing rapidly in recent years.

San Jose-based eBay made $7.7 billion in revenue in 2007 and has 279 million registered users. It is the 17th most popular English-language site, according to traffic ranking site Alexa, while Craigslist ranks 45th.

Craigslist, based in San Francisco, has never disclosed revenue figures. It charges for job ads and apartment listings only in select cities.

Newmark, a former IBM programmer, founded Craigslist in 1995 as a roundup of local events in San Francisco, but the bare-bones site fast became a popular online destination and has branched out to 450 cities worldwide. Although it has always used a ".org" domain name usually associated with nonprofits, Craigslist incorporated as a for-profit company in 1999.

With 25 employees working out of Victorian houses in San Francisco’s Inner Sunset neighborhood, the site has grown from 1 billion page views per month in 2004 to 9 billion per month now, according to Craigslist. It hosts 30 million new classifieds a month, most posted for free.

EBay spokeswoman Kim Rubey declined to quantify eBay’s current stake in Craigslist.

Much larger eBay, which has 15,000 employees, is asking Delaware’s Court of Chancery to negate Craigslist’s board’s actions.

The complaint is under seal because of confidentiality restrictions, according to a company statement. Craigslist may ask the court to make the complaint publicly available, eBay said.

The lawsuit was announced 45 minutes before stock markets closed Tuesday. EBay’s stock closed at $30.89, up 26 cents, then gained a penny in after-hours trading.

Senators Debate Future of Web

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Kevin Martin said Tuesday his agency has all the authority it needs to prevent Internet service providers from discriminating against Web surfers and that new legislation is unnecessary.

"I do not believe any additional regulations are needed at this time," Martin said at a hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee. "But I also believe that the commission has a responsibility to enforce the principles that it has already adopted."

The FCC has conducted two hearings on "network management" following admissions by Comcast Corp. that it sometimes delayed file-sharing traffic for subscribers as a way to keep Web traffic flowing.

The hearing was called at a time when the issue of "network neutrality" - the principle that people should be able to go where they choose on the Internet without interference from network owners - has heated up.

The network neutrality debate has divided Congress, with Democrats largely in favor and Republicans mostly opposed, a point that became clearer at Tuesday's committee meeting.

"It is a political division now and it's getting more so," said Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska. "It is unfortunate." He said a return to "intense regulation" of the Internet is "entirely unwarranted."

The hearing included some star power, with the appearance of Justine Bateman, best known for her role on the TV sitcom Family Ties. Bateman is now a founding partner of a new online media venture.

"The idea of your site succeeding or failing based upon whether or not you paid the telecom companies enough to carry your material or allow quick access is appalling," she told the committee.

Also speaking for a free-flowing Internet was Patric Verrone, the president of the Writers Guild of America, West, which recently ended a 100-day strike that virtually paralyzed television production. The Internet was a valuable organizing tool for the writers, he said in an interview.

"When your employers are the same companies that control the media, it's hard to get your message out," Verrone said.

To maintain contact with one another, guild members used blog postings, e-mail and videos. It was the success of that campaign that prompted Verrone to come to Washington and push for legislation that he hopes will guarantee the Internet's status as an open forum for communication.

Verrone, a television writer and producer for over 20 years, supports legislation proposed by Sens. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, and Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., that would force those who control Internet service to treat all traffic equally.

Large network owners like cable and telecommunications companies are opposed to network neutrality legislation, saying it would add a layer of regulation that will hurt consumers. They say it is unnecessary and amounts to a solution in search of a problem.

Kyle McSlarrow, president and CEO of the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, described the picture painted by pro-net neutrality commenters as "a complete fantasy."

McSlarrow said of the tens of millions of people who use the Internet every day, "no one is being blocked" and if they were, they could go to another service provider.

Martin told the panel that the FCC's anti-discrimination "Internet Policy Statement," approved in 2005, is enforceable and gives the commission adequate authority to protect consumers.

When the policy was approved, Martin had a different opinion, however.

In his statement at the time, he noted "policy statements do not establish rules nor are they enforceable documents" but that the commission decision "does reflect core beliefs that each member of this Commission holds regarding how broadband Internet access should function."

NJ Court Requires Subpoena for Internet Subscriber Records

Internet service providers must not release personal information about users in New Jersey without a valid subpoena, even to police, the state's highest court ruled Monday.

New Jersey's Supreme Court found that the state's constitution gives greater protection against unreasonable searches and seizures than the U.S. Constitution.

The court ruled that Internet providers should not disclose private information to anyone without a subpoena.

A Washington lawyer who handles Internet litigation, Megan E. Gray, said the ruling "seems to be consistent with a trend nationwide, but not a strong trend."

"It's contrary to what is happening with rights of privacy at the federal level," Gray said. "But it's all over the board for the states, with a mild trend toward protecting this information."

Grayson Barber, a lawyer representing the American Civil Liberties Union, Electronic Frontier Foundation and the Electronic Privacy Information Center, among other groups that filed friend-of-the-court briefs in the case, said it was the first ruling in the nation to recognize a reasonable expectation of privacy for Internet users.

"The reality is that people do expect a measure of privacy when they use the Internet," Barber said.

The 7-0 ruling upheld lower court decisions that restricted police from obtaining the identity of a Cape May County woman accused of retaliating in 2004 against her boss after an argument by changing her employer's access codes to a supplier's Web site.

Police obtained the woman's identity through her Internet provider, Comcast Corp., by tracing an Internet fingerprint left by her computer. The fingerprint consisted of an Internet protocol address, often called an IP address, that could be identified only by Comcast.

Police obtained a subpoena for the data from a municipal court, but higher courts said a grand jury subpoena was necessary because an indictable offense was at issue.

Police must seek a criminal grand jury subpoena to get such information, the court found. And it said the woman's 2005 indictment on a charge of theft by computer cannot stand unless prosecutors have enough proof without the evidence, now suppressed, that they got from Comcast without having the right subpoena.

Prosecutors can resume their pursuit of the information.

"Suppression under the circumstances present here does not mean that the evidence is lost in its entirety. Comcast’s records existed independently of the faulty process the police followed," Chief Justice Stuart Rabner wrote for the unanimous court. "And, unlike a confession coerced from a defendant in violation of her constitutional rights, the record does not suggest that police conduct in this case in any way affected the records Comcast kept."

Cape May County Prosecutor Robert L. Taylor said his office will seek a grand jury subpoena and a new indictment.

Customs Can Search All Files on a Laptop, Court Rules

Business travelers carrying laptops into the U.S. from overseas may be in for a rude experience. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Monday that U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officers can search laptops - including opening every file on the hard drive - without any reasonable suspicion.

The decision in United States v Arnold by a three-judge panel reverses a U.S. District Court decision that said such searches require reasonable suspicion.

The case concerns Michael Arnold, who arrived at Los Angeles International Airport from the Philippines and was pulled aside by customs agents for a random laptop search. When the officers started up the computer they found two folders on the desktop labeled Kodak Pictures and Kodak Memories.

When they found photos of nude women in those folders, they spent several hours opening multiple files until they found images of child pornography. They seized the computer and two weeks later obtained a warrant. A grand jury charged Arnold with breaking federal child-pornography laws.

In its ruling, the Ninth Circuit held that international arrivals at U.S. airports are subject to the same rules as border crossings. Those rules give customs officials broad leeway to conduct searches of anything a traveler brings into the country. The international terminal of a U.S. airport is the "functional equivalent of a border," the court said, citing the U.S. Supreme Court case of Almeida-Sanchez v. United States.

In arguments before the court, Arnold’s lawyer, Marilyn Bednarski, had a creative argument to get around the presumption that border searches are reasonable. Computers are "an extension of ourselves," she told media outlets this week. "It really is like looking into someone’s mind, rather than looking into a box or a folder or a purse."

In other words, Bednarski argued, laptops are actually an extension of our bodies. That argument is based on a Supreme Court holding that there is at least one limit to border officers’ ability to search at will. In a 1985 case, United States v. Montoya de Hernandez, the Supreme Court ruled that officers do need reasonable suspicion to search the alimentary canal because "the interests in human dignity and privacy which the

Fourth Amendment protects forbid any such intrusion on the mere chance that desired evidence might be obtained."

The appeals court didn’t buy that argument.

Bednarksi also argued that the laptop was the equivalent of one’s home, since it potentially contains digital versions of all the images and documents traditionally kept in the home. In another 1985 case, California v. Carney, the Supreme Court ruled that not even a mobile home is accorded the same privacy interest as an actual home since it is "readily movable." A laptop is even more movable than a mobile home, the court noted.

International travelers uncomfortable with having their laptops searched might want to consider storing files online and renting a laptop when they get to their destination country, or encrypting their files if they do travel with a laptop.

"It’s so easy to encrypt your files, passing through any spot where you are liable to be searched with sensitive data unencrypted seems brain-dead," one person posted on a blog.

Russian Prosecutors Eye Internet Censorship

The Russian prosecutor’s office wants tough anti-extremism laws to be extended to the Internet, state newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta reported Wednesday, prompting fears of growing media censorship.

The prosecutors office has proposed a legal amendment to bring the Internet under the same rules as printed media, Vyacheslav Sizov, a top official at the prosecutor general’s office told the daily.

Newspapers deemed in court to have published extremist material can be shut down under current laws.

The new proposal is for any website deemed to have hosted extremist material to be blocked by providers in Russia "within a month," Sizov said.

The Internet is the freest area of the media in Russia, where almost all television and many newspapers are under formal or unofficial government control.

The extremism law has already come under fire from human rights activists, who say its sweeping nature is open to abuse by officials wanting to outlaw legitimate criticism.

"It is a worry whenever the government tries to change any law," Oleg Panfilov, director of the Centre of Journalism in Extreme Situations, told AFP.

"It is difficult to find anyone who is not against extremism but it depends on how the law is used. The government uses (it) selectively."

News website www.gazeta.ru was warned for extremism last year after it wrote about cartoons that satirised the prophet Mohammed.

OLPC Switch to Windows on XO Is ’Muddled,’ Developers Say

Open-source developers should stop bickering, unite and jointly develop a Windows user interface to make XO laptops more appealing to users, One Laptop Per Child Chairman Nicholas Negroponte has urged in a public note to that community.

Developers in the open-source community did not take lightly to Negroponte’s comments, expressing outrage and questioning the judgment of OLPC’s shift from Linux to Windows for the XO laptop. Developers called Negroponte’s appeal "vague" and "demoralizing" for the future development of Sugar, the user interface that currently works with Linux on XO laptops.

In a note on OLPC’s community site, Negroponte wrote that Sugar is less than perfect and needs to be developed for Windows to expand the laptop’s appeal. The nonprofit has engaged in discussions with Microsoft to load Windows on dual-boot versions of the XO laptop.

"I attribute our weakness to unrealistic development goals and practices," Negroponte wrote. "Our mission has never changed. It has been to bring connected laptops for learning to children in the poorest and most remote locations of the world. Our mission has never been to advocate the perfect learning model or pure Open Source."

Sugar needs to be separated from the OS core and made platform agnostic, Negroponte wrote. "To do that, we need to hire more developers, work more together and spend less time arguing."

This week developers began debating XO’s possible shift from Linux to Windows after Monday’s resignation of Walter Bender, OLPC’s president of software and content. Bender gained a following in the open-source community by promoting open-source software for the XO despite growing efforts to load the laptop with Windows XP.

In a note posted Monday at OLPC’s community news, Bender said that he was leaving to advance the quality open-source software for learning and would continue to work with the OLPC community "by adopting the spirit and methodology of the open-source movement."

Observers contend that Bender left because he was less than happy with OLPC’s move from open source to Windows on the XO laptop. Some developers saw it as a sign that OLPC is scaling down Sugar’s development.

Drawing that conclusion from Bender’s departure is incorrect, Negroponte wrote: "We are scaling Sugar up, not down."

Developers replied that his vision of Sugar for Windows is muddled and that he is further dividing himself from OLPC’s developer community.

"If you are not serious about Sugar on Windows within the next year, please continue to avoid ’now’ and use ’might’ and ’someday’ when you talk about it, and we’ll continue to try to make Sugar-on-Linux achieve its potential," wrote C. Scott Ananian in a community posting at the OLPC site.

"I approve of keeping OLPC’s options open, in case your current

development team (myself included) cannot deliver on Sugar’s potential, but setting vague (and demoralizing) goals for future development - without actually devoting the resources to achieve those goals - is madness. You have only succeeded in alienating the developers you need to make Sugar-on-Linux work, without actually achieving any progress on Sugar-on-Windows," Ananian wrote.

Porting Sugar, which runs on multiple Linux distributions, to Windows shouldn’t be hard, but the question is whether users will have the same experience on both OSes, wrote Tomeu Vizoso.

Negroponte wrote that Sugar needs to be changed from an omelet to a fried egg "with distinct yoke and white, rather than having the UI, collaborative tools, power management and radios merge into one amorphous blob."

Vizoso wouldn’t chew on Negroponte’s vision of a fried egg. "My understanding is that the Sugar UI is composed of inseparable components because we wanted to give an integrated and coherent experience. In which way are you suggesting to split Sugar?"

Ubuntu 8.04 Released

The latest version of the popular Ubuntu Linux distribution was officially released to the public today after the customary beta-test period. This version is designated "LTS," for "long-term support," which should make it attractive to business customers who prefer a longer upgrade cycle for their operating systems.

Ubuntu 8.04 is available in a version tailored for server systems, but in the past it has been the desktop version that has garnered the most attention. The new release should be no different, as it includes a number of improvements for desktop users - most notably, a new installer that allows the OS to coexist on a Windows computer without partitioning or re-formatting the hard drive.

As is customary for Linux distributions, Ubuntu 8.04 includes incremental updates to many of the software packages that make up the system, from low-level details like the window manager and graphics subsystem, all the way up to the bundled OpenOffice.org productivity suite. The new release is also the first to ship with the Firefox 3.0 browser, which is currently still in late-stage beta testing. Despite some bleeding-edge additions to the package, my early testing of Ubuntu 8.04 showed it to be a remarkably stable and well-polished Linux desktop.

Full disclosure: I’ve tried many different desktop Linux distributions, but Ubuntu remains my personal favorite. I will definitely be upgrading the Ubuntu partition on the computer from which I write this, just as soon as I’m able.

Of course, getting your own copy of Ubuntu may well be the trick. The main servers are typically overburdened in the first few days after a new release. Be sure to use the mirror nearest you, or better still, use BitTorrent. Links to torrent files are hidden away on the main Ubuntu site, but they’re available. Using BitTorrent helps to relieve the load on the download servers, plus you get the satisfaction of helping fellow Linux users get their own copies of Ubuntu while you download yours. (If

the server is too slow to let you navigate to the torrent files, try here for a torrent for the desktop version for i386.)

Not All :) As Informal Writing Creeps Into Teen Assignments

It’s nothing to LOL about: Despite best efforts to keep school writing assignments formal, two-thirds of teens admit in a survey that emoticons and other informal styles have crept in.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project, in a study released Thursday, also found that teens who keep blogs or use social-networking sites like Facebook or News Corp.’s MySpace have a greater tendency to slip nonstandard elements into assignments.

The results may give parents, teachers and others a big :(- a frown to the rest of us - though the study’s authors see hope.

"It’s a teachable moment," said Amanda Lenhart, senior research specialist at Pew. "If you find that in a child’s or student’s writing, that’s an opportunity to address the differences between formal and informal writing. They learn to make the distinction ... just as they learn not to use slang terms in formal writing."

Half of the teens surveyed say they sometimes fail to use proper capitalization and punctuation in assignments, while 38 percent have carried over the shortcuts typical in instant messaging or e-mail messages, such as "LOL" for "laughing out loud." A quarter of teens have used :) and other emoticons.

Overall, 64 percent have used at least one of the informal elements in school.

Teens who consider electronic communications with friends as "writing" are more likely to carry the informal elements into school assignments than those who distinguish the two.

The study was co-sponsored by the National Commission on Writing at the College Board, the nonprofit group that administers the SAT and other placement tests.

The chairman of the commission’s advisory board, Richard Sterling, said the rules could possibly change completely within a generation or two: Perhaps the start of sentences would no longer need capitalization, the way the use of commas has decreased over the past few decades. "Language changes," Sterling said.

Defying conventional wisdom, the study also found that the generation born digital is shunning computer use for most assignments. About two-thirds of teens say they typically do their school writing by hand. And for personal writing outside school, longhand is even more popular - the preferred form for nearly three-quarters of teens.

That could be because the majority of writing is short - school assignments are on average a paragraph to a page in length, Lenhart said.

Among other findings:

* Teens who keep blogs are more likely to engage in personal writing. They also tend to believe that writing will prove crucial to their eventual success in life.

* Parents are more likely than teens to believe that Internet-based writing such as e-mail and instant messaging affects writing overall, though both groups are split on whether the electronic communications help or hurt. Nonetheless, 73 percent of teens and 40 percent of parents believe Internet writing makes no difference either way.

The telephone-based survey of 700 U.S. residents ages 12 to 17 and their parents was conducted Sept. 19 to Nov. 16 and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 5 percentage points.

Microsoft Starts Testing Office Subscription Sales

Microsoft Corp started testing a new way of selling its Office software suite on a subscription basis, packaging it with security software and free online services.

Microsoft on Friday launched a new test program code-named "Albany" that will allow consumers to download and install Office 2007, which includes Word processing and Excel spreadsheet, and then receive updates for a subscription instead of a more traditional one-time license fee.

Consumers will also receive Windows Live OneCare, a Web-based security software, and online applications including Windows Live Mail and Office Live Workspace.

Microsoft did not disclose how it plans to set the pricing for "Albany" or when it would be widely available.

The company faces competition from Google Inc and a slew of start-ups including privately-held Zoho, which are offering applications comparable to Office but delivered through a Web browser for free or a monthly subscription.

Microsoft said this is not a complete overhaul of how it sells software.

"We are definitely not straying from our traditional software sales model," said Bryson Gordon, product manager for the project.

"There will always be a significant number of users for whom purchasing a perpetual license to the latest version of Office is still the best choice. "Albany" just gives customers more choice."

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